

SENTENCE SKILLS TEST STRATEGIES

LANGUAGE ARTS MECHANICS

- Take a general look at what you're reading. Often capitalization errors are obvious at a glance.
- Check for capitalization rules that have been broken. Consistently review mechanics rules for proper nouns, titles, sentence beginnings, proper adjectives, certain places, etc.
- If you are asked to choose the correct phrase, compare the phrases word-for-word. Don't be fooled by phrases that look almost the same.
- Look for places where punctuation is obviously missing.
- As you read a sentence silently, every time you feel the need to pause because of what the sentence is saying, consider putting a punctuation mark.
- Look for too many punctuation marks. If a sentence looks cluttered, chances are that it may be over punctuated.
- Think about the punctuation rules you've learned. Consistently review the rules for using commas, periods, apostrophes, quotation marks, colons and semicolons, and so on.
- Be aware of numbers. Review the special rules for placing punctuation marks around numbers.

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/test-taking-strategies-three-subject-areas>

CONSIDER EACH SENTENCE YOU ARE ASKED TO LOOK AT. What are the possible problems? Below find some common shortcomings inexperienced writers face. When taking the test, look for:

1. Sentence fragments: Does the sentence seem incomplete?
2. Comma splices: Does the sentence seem too long when you read it to yourself? I may have a comma inserted where a stronger form of punctuation would work better.
3. Agreement of different parts of the sentence: Does the sentence shift between present and past tense? Between singular and plural subjects?
4. Verb form: Do the tenses and count of the verbs match the subjects?
5. Logic of sentence ideas: Does the sentence make sense?
6. Smoothness of expression: Does the sentence sound awkward or clunky when you read it to yourself?

LOOK AT EACH ANSWER CHOICE SEPARATELY. You might want to use a piece of paper under each choice to help yourself focus on each option one at a time. Ask yourself, "How does each answer change the meaning or structure of the sentence?"

READ THE SENTENCES ALOUD. Twenty people reading out loud at once would be absurd, so actually just whisper them to yourself. But by reading aloud you are using another sense to help you. If you HEAR something that sounds wrong, it probably is! Trust your ears.

LOOK FOR WORD CLUES within each sentence and answer. If the original sentence used a "*however* thought," the right answer might use a "*but* thought" to say the same thing.

BE AWARE THAT, IN MOST CASES, SHORTER IS BETTER. Careful here though, not all the correct answers are the ones with shorter responses; however, when evaluating sentence structure usually the more concise your expression is, or in other words, the more you can say a lot in a little instead of using more words to say the same thing, the better off you'll be. So, if you've narrowed the choices to two and can't decide between them, usually if you choose the shorter answer you will increase your chances of success.

MAKE EDUCATED GUESSES. The score is based on the number right. There is no penalty for the number wrong. So, don't leave blanks. You can't hurt your score, and you might even help it. Use the process of elimination to narrow down your choices. Eliminate answers that you recognize as being wrong. Of the possible answers left, choose the one that seems most likely the right answer, even if it comes down to the one that "sounds better." If there are two answers that are very similar, there's a good chance that one of those responses is the correct one. Why would they put two obviously wrong answers as choices? Odds are they're trying to get you to choose between the two. Doing so, will increase your odds. After making thoughtful guesses, do not go back and rehash possible answers. You'll make yourself crazy!

STAY ON TRACK. Make sure you're clicking your selection. If you are rushed or anxious you may get wrong answers just from not being careful with the mouse or the keyboard. Try to stay focused on each task at hand. Thinking about the sections you haven't done will not help you with the section you're on.

<http://ux.brookdalecc.edu/fac/writing/095/practice/AccuplTips.html>

RESOURCES

1. Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab) <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>
2. Grammar Monster <http://grammar-monster.com/>
3. Edufinder English Grammar Guide <http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/english-grammar-guide/>
4. Khan Academy Reading and Writing <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/sat-reading-writing-practice>